

Minutes of the 29th Annual General Meeting of the Council of Irish County Associations held at the Irish Centre on Sunday Feb 7th 1982.

The meeting opened under the Chairmanship of Mr S. Troy.

In his opening address Mr Troy expressed his pleasure at seeing such a large and representative gathering. He extended a warm welcome to Mr Gerry Corry from the Irish Embassy, Mr Michael Hogan, Chairman of the Federation of Irish Societies, Mr Gerry Feeney of B+J. The Chairman said the recent death of Mr Tadgh Feenan was a source of sadness to us all and proposed a vote of sympathy to Mr Feenan's family.

The next item on the agenda was the adoption of standing orders.

The adoption was proposed by Mr John O'Keeffe and seconded by Mr Michael Sells.

The appointment of tellers was agreed as follows Mr John Dee, Mr Tom Reeves, and Mr M. Kildan.

The minutes of the 28th Annual General Meeting were read and adopted on the proposition of Mr Bob. Daly, and seconded by Mr B. Aubsherry.

The Secretary's report was read and adopted on the proposition of Mr J. O'Keeffe and seconded by Mr B. Aubsherry. The Chairman thanked Mrs Allen for her efforts throughout the year.

Treasurer's Report: This was given by Mrs B. Shan whom Mr Troy thanked for her dedicated work throughout the year.

The report was adopted on the proposition of Mrs Teresa Doyle and seconded by Mrs B. Duck. Welfare Fund Report. We had paid out £ 5460. in grants during during 1981. The fund now stands at £15,358-76.

The report was adopted on the proposition of Mr S. Dunbar, and seconded by Mr R. Boston. The Chairman's address was next on the agenda. Mr Troy said it is once again my great pleasure to address you all on the occasion of our Annual General Meeting and I begin by thanking you for your attendance in such representative numbers and your delegates who have regularly

attended our monthly meetings. For as far back as we care to remember we have poised ourselves ^{at this time of year} to review and analyse the events of the year gone by, whilst looking forward to what we hope will prove to be a more successful and rewarding period in our lives.

Inevitably the old clichés come readily to mind and although we exercise a firm determination to cast these aside, we nevertheless find that there are many common denominators which contribute to our thoughts and sentiments. Peace has always taken a prominent place and as we look back on 1981 and forward to 1982 that same subject "peace" must once again take top priority.

1981 was the year of the disabled, but I doubt if this title will feature much in the writings of the historians when they record the events of this period. More likely 1981 will be recorded as a year of violence, tragedy and loss of innocent life. Who ever would have dreamed that in our life time we would have witnessed an attempt on the life of his Holiness the Pope.

How can we visualise or measure the anguish of the parents of these young victims of the Stardust fire tragedy in Dublin, or know the extent of the heart break suffered by the mothers and fathers of those young men who slowly edged to their death, while on hunger strike in the Maze prison; surely in God's name there must be another way.

Of course you may well ask, what relevance have or how do we begin to equate them with the workings of this meeting or this Council. At first glance one might well be excused for dismissing them as just the inevitable norm and nothing more than a true reflection of the society in which we live. But I believe that upon closer scrutiny we will find that they have a much greater significance because however great a personal problem may appear or how irreconcilable a difference of opinion may seem to be, surely such situations pale in to insignificance when compared to some of the events I have outlined.

Ireland has always been looked upon as a Nation whose people take great pride in their culture and traditions, their heritage and Christian ideals, and it is not without good reason that our Country has been given the title, "Island of Saints and Scholars" and the Land of a thousand welcomes. But however commendable those attributes may be there has remained a singular flaw in the Irish character and make up, a flaw which regrettably is as prevalent today as at any time in our history that is our apparent inability to work together in unison and harmony. That flaw manifests itself at all levels in our society, from the highest national level as exemplified by the appalling state of affairs that continues to exist in Northern Ireland, right down to the grass-roots level so to speak of organisations, and societies such as our own.

In my earlier remarks I have said peace would again be a dominant factor in our lives during 1982. To that factor I would now like to add the qualities of unity, mutual respect, understanding and good will, and in such a context take a brief look, first of all at our Council and its role within our society of to-day.

In so do I propose to categorise at least three areas of our activities, namely, Youth, Welfare and Image & Effectiveness.

Like myself I imagine that all of you welcome and are appreciative of the degree of attention given to the youth within our organisations during the past year, and it is to be hoped that this positive step forward has not come too late.

It is imperative that we render every possible assistance in the fostering and formation of youth groups, but in doing so we must also be most careful not to overstep the mark in terms of domination, but rather to act and be seen as a united and efficient body who pursues its ideals and objectives in a manner likely to inspire those young people into carrying on our work in the years ahead.

Welfare. Turning to the question of Welfare, I feel I can do no better than reiterate my word at

last years A. G. M. when I said that in times of recession, organisations like ours, can perhaps play their most effective role.

Sadly the economic recession of 1980 carried on in an even more devastating manner through 1981 and of course those already in need can draw little comfort ^{FROM} the predictions for 1982.

Coupled with the high level of unemployment there is another area which must be of particular concern for us all and that is the plight of large numbers of our fellow country people who came to this country in the late '30s and early '40s and through a misguided youth or otherwise, now find themselves totally unprepared financially, for their years of retirement. Whilst in no way suggesting that the flood gates be opened in terms of disposing of the monies in the Welfare Fund, I do ~~none the less~~ sincerely hope that nobody will fail to utilise the fund when a case is deserving and justified.

The interesting terms of reference are I believe, adequate to cater for our requirements though in the light of the prevailing and continuing rate of inflation, it may soon prove necessary to reassess the limit of grants.

In my third category of analysis, I have placed the two aspects of image and effectiveness because, for me at any rate, these constitute what is commonly referred to as the thin dividing line between success and failure, or if not failure mediocre existence.

Each and everyone of us is an ambassador in our own right and how we act in our private and public lives will be seen rightly or wrongly, as a reflection on our country of origin.

But how much more effective that reflection becomes when we are seen to act as a united and capable body and at this stage I return to the ~~questions~~ of unity, mutual respect, understanding and goodwill. We are all by virtue of our individual constitutions in pursuit of a common

goal and in such circumstances there can be no room within our ranks for the pursuit of self glorification and agitation.

I think I feel the day has gone when Irish people were regarded as incapable of any measure of organisation. The Popes visit certainly saw to that.

But of course we also can take some pride in our achievements in this field because there is no doubt that the success story of the London Irish Festival has opened the eyes of many people.

Success breeds success but will only do so if the all too common pitfalls such as complacency are avoided.

Let us remember that the rewards of one successful Festival is the power to fulfill another.

We must not fail to utilise this opportunity to its full potential in displaying all that is best in our national heritage and culture, but let us also never forget that our first concern is always the image portrayed on the day and that any financial rewards are by way of a secondary. Though of course welcome bonuses.

The Irish Centre: As has been my practice in the previous years I would now like to direct my thoughts for a short while to the Irish Centre and its future. When I expressed some views about the Irish Centre at our A.G.M. last year, sadly there were some who felt unable to accept my remarks in the honest and constructive spirit in which they were intended, but rather saw ~~them~~ fit to use them as a reason to try and disrupt the workings of this Council and also to make my job as Chairman as difficult as possible for the greater part of last year.

I do not propose to pass judgement on or to condemn anyone, I leave their actions to their own conscience but what I can do is to say that I stand by all I said and the matter, as far as I am concerned is water under the bridge.

What is of importance to-day is not the Irish Centre of the past but instead the Irish Centre of the future and firstly I would like to wish the new Director, Fr Malone, every success in his work.

When the Irish Centre first opened its doors in the 50s it started by offering a much needed service to the less fortunate. That service has continued down through the years and how gratifying it is to know that the facilities now being offered are soon to be enhanced by the opening of the ^{new} Welfare wing. I am convinced that debt or no debt, the Welfare service of the Irish Centre will survive, but what can be said of the Social and Commercial side. Recently Fr Malone wrote to invite all Chairmen and Secretaries to a meeting at the Centre and the response resulted in 12 Counties being represented.

The purpose of that meeting was to obtain your views on the future of the Centre, in other words a pooling of ideas, and with this aim in mind a further meeting has been arranged for Tuesday Feb 23. I would ask you now to make a note of this date and to ensure that your County is represented here on Feb. 23rd. But to come and listen will assist no body, express your views and suggestions and provided they are meaningful and constructive I am sure they will be welcomed. I am only too well aware that many of you have not been entirely happy with the affairs of the Centre in the past, but that is history, what matters now is that we have an opportunity of putting matters right and we must take that opportunity.

But as I have also said so many times in the past, this is by no means a one way process, its a two way street and any positive contribution on the part of the Co. Assocs must be met with an equally positive and appreciative response on the part of the Irish Centre. In conclusion, I would like to thank my fellow Officers and members of the Executive for their support and co-operation during the past year.

I would like to express a special word of thanks to the manager of the Irish Centre, Mr John O'Shea for his courtesy and help at all times, and I wish all of you & your Associations a peaceful and successful 1982.